

## **Grenada – The Tropical Spice Isle**

### **Patricia Cleveland-Peck investigates the food scene on this beautiful island**

The bounty of the seas and the amazing ease with which vegetables, spices and fruit grows in Grenada means that there are plenty of treats in store for food lovers. The ethnic mix of the population who are mainly of West African descent with a small percentage of Indian, French and British has resulted in a unique traditional cuisine. Add to this a high number of skilled chefs operating in a range of establishments from street stalls to high-end restaurants and the result is gastronomic treats for all budgets. There are several places in which you can see fruit, herbs and spices growing including Belmont Estate at which you can also obtain a first rate buffet lunch.

### **The Calabash**

One of the best restaurants on the island is at The Calabash Hotel. The dining room is entrancing, hundreds of Thunbergia vine flowers hang suspended airily over the tables and in the late afternoon the staff can be observed meticulously placing the tables equidistant from each other and adjusting the crockery and cutlery butler-style, so that everything looks at its best. Most of the Calabash regulars opt for an inclusive or MAP (dinner bed and breakfast) package and take great pleasure in dressing up in the evenings and this, together with the décor and the views over the illuminated gardens, makes for a very celebratory atmosphere.

Our dinners there were excellent. The service was friendly but utterly professional at all times. On the menu there was always a good selection of locally caught fish: tuna, dorado, barracuda and snapper as well as lobster, prawns and shrimps. The cooking was innovative and all dishes were attractively served.

For the first meal I began with chilled gazpacho soup to which cubes of fresh melon had been added. This, served with plantain crisps on the side, was perfect for a warm evening. Dennis chose the Calabash classic Shrimp and Callaloo Tart as a starter. Shrimps here mean prawns and very succulent ones at that and callaloo is the spinach like leaves of one of the most useful local plants, the tuber dasheen.

I enjoyed a perfectly cooked lobster risotto as a main course and then because of the Irish in me, couldn't resist trying Guinness Ice Cream for pudding. It had an unusual velvety-vanilla texture in the mouth followed by a pleasant but slightly

bitter after taste, quite like the froth on a draught Guinness. Memorable. Dennis meanwhile tucked into a Banana Chocolate pudding with great gusto.

This was a very ample meal and we were pleased to see that the menu also included a welcome selection of simpler dishes and smaller portions, known as Light Bites, some of which we sampled on other occasions. The Cajun Shrimp with Paw Paw was particularly good – an example of the chef's skill at pairing fruit with fish or meat.

Similar to the Light Bites were the lunch dishes served at Calabash's beach bar, Bash's. Here the dress code is very informal and the menu consists of salads, a variety of tapas-like dishes with pasta, chips with daily specials also available. With a glass of wine or a cold beer, a beachside meal here beneath palm trees lives up to everyone's expectations of the Caribbean dream.

### **Oliver's Restaurant at Spice Island Beach**

Spice Island Beach Resort Oliver's Restaurant offers another of Grenada's top dining experiences. In keeping with the resort's lavish style, instead of an a la carte menu, there are 7- and 5- course tasting menus.

For our first dinner there we chose the Duo of Smoked Sailfish as a starter and both the sushi and the tartar, attractively served on a brioche with a washabi emulsion, were very tasty. Next came a Cream of Dasheen soup – dasheen being the starchy tube, the green leaves of which are callaloo. The soup was dusted with nutmeg, Grenada's national treasure. Of this spice, as well as the 'nut' which is in fact the seed, use is also made of its lacey covering known as mace and even the previously discarded pericarp or pod is here processed into jam, syrup and a pleasant liqueur. Another home grown spice, cinnamon, featured together with basil in the sorbet which came next to refresh our palates.

Dennis chose Pan Fried Grouper with crushed green banana and mango and papaya relish as a main course. As nearly always, the fish was locally caught and the pairing with green banana was inspired. I was pleased to see that here too a Lighter Option was available and chose Baked Rainbow Runner fillet with romaine lettuce, wax apple and vinaigrette dressing. The Rainbow Runner aka Yellow Tail is a member of the Jack family of deep sea fish with which we had not previously been acquainted. It was full of flavour. At this point I bowed out fully satisfied and only Dennis could managed a pudding. Although there was a good choice of sorbets, ice creams and tropical fruit salads, he could not resist the Baked Chocolate Fondant with caramel ice cream sauce. The fondant was meltingly good and perfectly complemented by the sauce.

### **The Petite Anse**

Dinner in the more intimate setting of Petite Anse is one of the most pleasurable things imaginable. First we took our drinks – the bar serves a large selection of cocktails- out onto the verandah and were lucky enough to see one of the most stupendous seascapes in the world by moonlight. We then returned to the attractive dining room for a feast which incorporated a fusion of the best of Caribbean and European cuisines. We started with fresh Caesar Salads after which I opted for locally caught Tuna with roast potatoes, green salad, breadfruit salad and local sweet corn cooked in coconut milk. Dennis chose locally caught Mahi Mahi with onion rings, star fruit ( known locally as five fingers) fried plantain, carrots – and rice seasoned with miniature peppers, garlic and chives. The salad leaves, rocket, chives, watercress and fruits come fresh from the owner's garden up the road. For desert we chose ice cream home-made from the delicious exotic soup sop fruit. A perfect finale to an exceptional meal.

### **The Flamboyant**

While the main restaurant at the The Flamboyant is not as elegant as those mentioned so far, the food served is nevertheless of a good quality, well cooked and reasonably priced. There is also the possibility, of which we availed ourselves, of having the same menu at the beach-side bar where the glorious ocean view compares more than favourably with any interior décor.

With a glass of very acceptable house white wine in our hands we enjoyed taking our time choosing from the menu which we were happy to see focused strongly on traditional West Indian specialities.

There are times however when you long for something simple and refreshing and for us Island Salad ticked this particular box. A sumptuous melange of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, chicken, shrimps, boiled egg, cheese and sultanas (with onions optional – something appreciated) it went down very well.

We both chose Caribbean Jumbo Shrimps for our main course, Dennis opting for them curried and I sautéed. Both very good – they are also available steamed in coconut milk.

Amongst other traditional dishes on the menu was Lambie – not lamb but the flesh of the Conch Shell which is almost a national dish; Tanty Christine's Tumeric Mutton – not mutton but tender goat meat marinated in herbs and spices and Grenadian Escovitched fish, for which the fish is placed in an acidic vinegar marinade before being pan fried and dressed with tomato, pepper onion and herbs.

For pudding we both sampled something delicious, Flamboyant's own Nutmeg Cheesecake. It was a very enjoyable meal in which the dishes were well presented and the service warm and friendly.

### **BB's Crabback**

In fact throughout Grenada there are many more local, homely inexpensive gastronomic pleasures to be had. One such is crab backs. These are land crabs, the flesh of which has been cooked with spices, herbs and vegetables, put back into the shell, dusted with breadcrumbs and baked. The place to sample them is BB's Crabback on the waterfront in St Georges, owned by exuberant Brian who spent many years running his own restaurant in Ealing before 'coming home'.

### **Patrick's Home Style Cooking**

Another good way of tasting a whole range of local dishes is at Patrick's Home Style Cooking at St George's where the meal consists of some 20 little plates of local produce. Here we enjoyed dasheen soup, lambie, as fried jacks, rice and peas in coconut cream, stir-fried rabbit and the traditional speciality, 'oil down,' a rich stew and coconut milk, which tastes better than its name suggests.

### **Fish Friday**

A popular event is Fish Friday a weekly community event held at the little town of Gouyave on the west coast. Food stalls are set up all along the street and as night falls every sort of fish and sea food is served to an appreciative crowd of locals and tourists. With musicians playing pans, and the rum flowing a good time is had by all.

### **Victoria Sunset Food Fest**

Almost better is the monthly Victoria Sunset Food Fest held on the last Saturday of each month. Here you find Grenadian cuisine made with local ingredients including bakes, small bananas confusingly known as figs, breadfruit, Farine, Jacks and other Fish, the Grenada Oil-Down, rotis, callaloo soup, crabs, lambie, Tania Log (a porridge prepared from root crops in a traditional manner), and ice cream. With music and dancing this is an event which benefits the local community which is only just recovering from Hurricane Ivan which destroyed 90% of the nutmeg crop.

Tourism is now Grenada's main industry – so your visit to this and any of the other establishments will not only give you great pleasure but will also benefit the country.

## Useful Links

[www.grenadagrenadines.com](http://www.grenadagrenadines.com) for more information about Grenada

[www.spiceislandbeachresort.com](http://www.spiceislandbeachresort.com)

[www.calabashhotel.com](http://www.calabashhotel.com)

[www.petiteanse.com](http://www.petiteanse.com)

[www.flamboyant.com](http://www.flamboyant.com)

[www.bbscrabback.com](http://www.bbscrabback.com)